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COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH IN RUSSIA

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The development of modern information technologies leads to the great amount of external tools of human activity. These complicated semiotic systems mediate the higher level of mental functions. The investigation of mediated forms of behavior belongs to the Russian tradition in psychological research. New communicative means essentially transform the operational structure of human activity, its orientation basis and motivational regulation. To illustrate this position, we present cumulative results of our investigation.

The research goals were the following: What are the specifics of computer mediated communication (CMC)? What is the psychological determination of human activity in a computer network? What are the psychological criteria of CMC development?

The series of investigations was carried out from 1992 to 1995. Questionnaires were administered via e-mail. Respondents (300 to 500) were the users of Russian computer networks and the BBS network (Fidonet).

The data obtained characterize computer networking as a new specific form of human communication. CMC has the following special features: the communicative process is stable and extremely sensitive; the partners' communicative interests are brought together; the partners are satisfied with the level of information exchange; the partners are very active and well-informed in the problems discussed.

CMC transforms the time and space parameters of interpersonal interaction. Eliminating the distance between partners, CMC transforms interpersonal social perception. By transmitting actual subjective information, situative emotional sets and moods, an extended psychological intimacy of communication partners appears.

CMC extends the sample of communication partners. Therefore, 45% of respondents find adherents and people whose interests are close to their own; 39% establish very useful contacts using computer networks; 36% of domestic users correspond via e-mail abroad; 31% of respondents consider their network partners to be good friends; 22% inform that their computer mediated contacts become permanent.

CMC transforms not only interpersonal communication but also motivational and emotional aspects of subject activity. The personal component of communication strengthens in CMC. According to A. Leontiev's Activity Theory, each kind of human activity is determined by the motive and satisfied the specific need of a human being. Of the respondents, 86% think that their actual information needs are primarily satisfied by CMC; 77% satisfied their cognitive needs; 45% think that computer networking allows the realization of their intellectual and creative abilities; 37% consider that computer networks give new possibilities for rest and relaxation. It is very significant for 35% of the respondents to feel themselves as belonging to the most informed and technologically advanced part of modern society, and 24% of the respondents value the possibilities to decrease communication deficits using CMC.

CMC becomes an important source of new mental formations, emerging in the different activity spheres — personal, cognitive, motivational, communicative. Of the respondents, 64% inform that CMC impels them to develop their knowledge and skills permanently and 40% consider that CMC helps them to develop personality and thinking abilities.